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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how educational practices have distorted the intentions of legislation designed to safeguard the needs of special education students. It looks at the history of special education in terms of three paradigms: (1) functionalism (which organizes social issues for the purpose of prediction and control and is based on the scientific method); (2) interpretivism (which emphasizes the emerging social process and views issues as subjective and socially created by people's perceptions); and critical theory (which combines radical humanism and radical structuralism to emphasize ways that ideological structures affect human thought and action and invite radical change). The paper uses case studies of two special needs students to illustrate the need for special educators to collaboratively integrate all three paradigms in their use of special education practices. An analysis of the case studies examines quantification for placement, one-way communication, and categorical placements. Justification for several current practices and recommended alternatives for others are provided. (Contains 30 references.) (DB)

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A practitioner's narrative: Separatism and collaboration among special education teachers and other stakeholders.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how educational practices have distorted the intentions of legislation designed to safeguard the needs of special education students. Although the purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is to insure appropriate placements, informed notification, consent and decisions, and collaborative programming, special education's response has been self-serving through excessive quantification, one-way communication, and poorly coordinated placements. Through narrative deconstruction, special education practices are re-examined using multiple perspectives including functionalism, interpretivism, and critical theory. Justification for several current practices and recommended alternatives for others are provided.

Background

Given the complexities of the world in which we live, it is not surprising that humans are driven to organize and categorize the chaos in their environments. This is accomplished through paradigms, the frameworks that, most often subconsciously, organize how we perceive everything around us. These paradigms work well much of the time. On the other hand, our paradigms unwittingly incarcerate our thinking and affect the lives of those around us. We don't think beyond the paradigms with which we are comfortable. We construct social categories that may or may not be based on natural or physical differences by which society labels and deals with social differences. This process, referred to as "structuration" by Bishop, Foster & Jubala (1992), reflects categories that are not necessarily natural, but are socially created.

The intent of this paper is to describe how decision-makers can use multiple paradigms to keep in sight the often forgotten needs of special education students which are sacrificed for the sake of efficiency, convenience or cost benefit. First, I present background information consisting of an overview of three paradigms I use in this discussion followed by a brief history of special education and its relationship to these paradigms. Second, I tell a story which includes several practices I observed as a special education administrator in a large, urban school district. Third, I deconstruct those practices from the perspectives of the three paradigms. Finally, I provide several

concluding remarks which provide no simplistic answers to the complex issues facing special education, but rather are reflections of the change process I am experiencing as a result of my inquiry of multiple paradigms which may be helpful to other administrators and their teachers.

Paradigm Choices and Shifts

Most often we are unaware that paradigms are controlling our behavior. But, when decisions are being made that affect the lives of children, a metacognitive understanding of the frameworks affecting those decisions can help improve their quality and the lives of students. Metacognitive understanding of paradigms helps our thinking on both a macroscopic level, pertaining to organizations and societies and a microscopic level, of individuals and groups (Skrtic, 1991)

Historically, macroscopic paradigm shifts have freed mankind to think differently. They paved the way for modern thought from Aristotle through the Enlightenment to Newton. Ward (1981) states that exclusive paradigms are,

> a manifestation of a tendency of people, in response to their very limited cognitive capacity, to simplify their complex world by building paradigms or partial paradigms. Once those paradigms are built, people tend to cling to them and build social structures, like research disciplines, to protect themselves and their paradigms from the threat of new knowledge (p. 63).

The paradigms. Burrell and Morgan (1982) categorized existing theory into four types, functionalism, interpretivism, radical humanism and radical structuralism, and these frameworks have been widely utilized in educational literature.

Functionalism is a rational approach which organizes social issues for the purpose of prediction and control. It is based on the scientific method, namely, hypothesis formulation, experimentation, and analysis. It views social issues as objective constructs waiting to be evaluated and generalized into theory.

Interpretivism addresses social issues but places emphasis on the emerging social process rather than on regulation and order. Its purpose is to describe and explain social constructions with theory demonstrating how these interrelate. Interpretivism views issues as subjective and socially created by people's perceptions.

Radical humanism emphasizes determination of how ideological structures affect human thought and action, criticizes the status quo and invites radical change. Radical structuralism also advocates for radical change, but on the basis of material structures rather than ideological, stressing political and economic action. Based on the similarity of purpose, social justice, the latter two have been combined into one approach called critical theory by several researchers (Capper, 1993; Foster, 1986; Reitzug & Capper, 1993; Schwandt, 1990; Sirotnik & Oakes, 1986; Smith, 1990) which will also be the structure used

for this discussion. Differentiating critical theory most from functionalism and interpretivism is its emphasis on emancipation, the freedom of oppressed persons from control of those holding power. It argues through logical analysis and open discourse.

Paradigm shifts. Functionalism has been the dominant paradigm throughout the development of special education administration (Skrtic, 1991). The history and development of organization theory, which forms the basis for educational administration, somewhat explains how this occurred. Organization theory received its beginnings from prescriptive thinking. Scientific management theory, standardized work processes, and formal managerial control guided school administrators into organizing the growing fragments and number of departments emerging in education. Students did not escape this efficiency thrust with classroom emphasis placed on drill and practice, and the Skinnerian model was being replicated extensively in special education settings.[1] A shift toward a subjective and more human oriented framework is currently attempting to replace this mechanistic model in the social sciences. Although there has been a partial paradigm shift in educational research, Skrtic (1991) maintains that educational administration remains "as it was in the mid-1950's". He charges that educational administration has not made any substantive change because it is locked in its functionalist paradigm.

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[1] For an historical review of organization theory, see Shafritz & Ott (1992) who present comments and copy of critical developments in the field.

The macroscopic views that paradigms provide have dominated educational literature, but paradigms are not the "stuff" of educational research only. Microscopic views drive the day to day operations of schools, but considerably less has been said about this. Is this because educational administrators are so wrapped up in their limited paradigms, they remain blind to alternative ways of viewing policy and practice, or is it because administrators have not been trained in alternative paradigms as Reinharz (1990) suggests?

Special Education

Education is a dual system which operates two separate tracks for students, the regular track and the special education track, and each has its own classification system, students, staff, funding, administrators, delivery of service and teacher training programs (Stainback & Stainback, 1984). Historically, special education was created as a subsystem of regular education (Reynolds & Birch, 1982) to serve students who were different with their "normalization" as the goal (Foster, Bishop & Jubala, 1992; Hahn, 1989). This normalization ideology stressed methodology that taught individual normalization procedures to students in secluded environments. Enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), which I will refer to as P.L.94-142, with its emphasis on least restrictive environment introduced a change in that thinking. Discussions focused on mainstreaming special education students, that is, placing them in the regular education program as it existed whenever possible.

Current discussions on the Regular Education Initiative (REI) differ from the mainstreaming conversations, in that the REI expects changes to be made in regular education to accommodate inclusion of special education students.

The legal basis for special education of today lies in civil rights legislation. The Supreme Court in Brown v. Board of Education in 1954 argued that education was a property right under the Fourteenth Amendment thereby guaranteeing equal access to all students. Thereafter, the stance of the judiciary was that every individual, including individuals with disabilities, has an equal right to a regular public education. PARC v. Pennsylvania (1971) and Mills v. Board of Education (1972) affirmed that placement of a student in special education is a deprivation of that right and, therefore, should occur only under strict scrutiny with due process safeguards.

Through the social action of parents of handicapped children, P.L.94-142 was passed in 1975. This law defined evaluation procedures, appropriate programming, least restrictive environment and due process procedures which included timely notification, opportunities for parent participation and informed consent. But special education engulfed itself in the rules and regulations associated with P.L.94-142 and concomitantly further locked itself in the functionalist paradigm. As a result, special education is disjointed with excessive emphasis on categories and procedures (Reynolds, Wang & Walberg, 1987). Many special educators within the field are now calling for the

elimination of categorical divisions and a merger of special education with regular education (Lipsky and Gartner, 1989; Pugach, 1988; Skrtic, 1991; Stainback & Stainback, 1984).

Epistemology to Practical Methodology

In current literature, there are ontological and epistemological discussions and theoretical explanations of various paradigms (Capper, 1993; Crandall, 1990; Foster, 1986; Gioia & Pitre, 1990; Green, 1990; Skrtic, 1991), but most articles do not give provide a pedagogy of how to employ multiple frameworks in practical situations. Gradually the literature is beginning to include some specific examples (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Eisner, 1990; Reitzug & Reeves, 1992), but those for special education administrators are sorely lacking.

The remainder of this paper addresses that need by narrating a story and then deconstructing it using multiple paradigms. The examples in the narration are not intended to imply that all are characteristic of every special education program, but rather are intended to demonstrate the degree of special education's entrapment in the functionalist paradigm. The grounding for these examples is my personal observations as an administrator in the school district hereafter referred to as MSD. The story of Nathan and Mae is based on true events that occurred in MSD. They are a compilation of incidents I encountered and are presented in a narrative format to provide order and interest. Although they did not occur in the order and manner they are

described here, they are representative of practices that occur to special education students and their families in MSD.

The Story

Setting. MSD is in an urban setting serving approximately 100,000 students in 146 schools. The city was noted for its strong manufacturing base which now shows declining patterns in line with national trends. As in other urban districts, there has been an exodus of white students with the district approaching a student population that is 70% students of color. The special education department consists of 7 administrators who formulate specific policies and procedures for implementation by 28 special education, categorical supervisors.

Nathan. Nathan L., is a severely to profoundly involved eight year old student with significant visual, auditory, developmental, motor, feeding and other health problems. He has been enrolled in self-contained special education since age three. Nathan's special education needs were being reevaluated for appropriate placement and programming. His most recent M-team reevaluation determined cognitive and language reception levels approximating a two year level on standardized evaluation instruments. Nathan does not consistently track objects, and specialists could not determine how much, if anything, he could see or hear. Nathan lives with both his adoptive parents who are white, lower middle class, and knowledgeable of Nathan's special education rights and sufficiently assertive to seek what they feel is most appropriate for him.

Mae. Mae R. is a six year old girl who experienced serious difficulties in her regular, first grade classroom. Her kindergarten experience was in the South, and she is new to MSD. Mae, an African American student, lives with her two sisters, who are both receiving special education services, and her natural mother. Mae's mother is unemployed and receives support from several governmental and private programs. Mae was referred for an initial evaluation for possible exceptional education needs and found to be moderately developmentally delayed.

Their Journey. Nathan's and Mae's special education journey officially began with the written date on their referral forms. This date starts the legal timeclock mandating that, a child, who qualifies for special education, must be offered a placement within 90 days. Technically, in MSD, this is the date a teacher hands the referral form to an administrator. However, there are unwritten practices that occur to intentionally delay this process. This happened to Mae. Her learning problems were lost in the September melange and were not identified by her classroom teacher until October. It was suggested to the teacher he delay referral until November to accommodate the over-burdened schedules of special education evaluators. On the other hand, MSD staff were quite aware of Nathan's parents and their knowledge of special education procedures, so his "official" referral was submitted in a timely manner.

After referral, the elaborate compliance monitoring process for Mae and Nathan began. Their parents received numerous

communications, which, according to the law, must be provided in a manner that is understandable. The policies and procedures of the MSD Special Education Handbook specify that administrators document at least three attempts to contact parents. Following three failed attempts, written notifications and consents on standardized forms are sent by certified mail. If no response is received, the file may be closed. The unwritten, but clearly understood, purpose of this procedure is to create a "paper trail" establishing that the school district complied with due process procedures. These procedures worked well for Nathan; they did not for Mae.

I visited Mae's dilapidated home to determine why her mother was not responding to these communications. It was a brisk day, and the wind howled through cracks around closed doors into the squalid kitchen where I sat with Mae and her mother. As I explained the forms and procedures, Ms. R. laid a stack of envelopes and papers on the table. She had saved every piece of communication we at MSD had sent to her. Although she realized their importance, she was unable to read and understand them. I explained the major points to her and showed her where to sign so Mae could be evaluated.

I took these forms back to the office where reams of typed diagnostic reports and forms were collected for both Nathan and Mae into a folder designated exclusively to the special education enrollment process. Criteria interpretation, authorization for program enrollment and due process surveillance is how MSD

special education supervisors spend the majority of their time. Their decisions are almost exclusively made from reading and approving written reports. Nathan's and Mae's folders were then routed to a number of departments within the special education office building (ranging from four to thirteen offices per folder depending on the program needs of the child) where they were read and approved or denied placement.

So this was the route Nathan's special education folder travelled in and out of categorical offices where each supervisor guarded the guidelines of their own domain with little or no interaction with other program personnel. One by one each supervisor read Nathan's educational life story and approved placement in their program of expertise. So far in the process there was no collaboration.

Mae's folder followed a similar path, but she ran into a snag. One of the supervisors decided Mae did not meet criteria for speech and language services. MSD had been informed by the state's education agency (SEA), the gatekeeper for P.L.94-142 funds, that the enrollment rate for the speech/language program was deemed too high by the SEA. Criteria, selection guidelines, for inclusion in the program were re-written to more clearly define, as quantitatively as possible, which child qualifies for the program, which does not. For example, a child that may have been "described" to have a need and qualify under previous criteria that was less stringent in data requirements might be excluded under the new criteria which defined a disability as 1.5

standard deviations below the mean on standardized measures. Mae's standardized testing found her language functioning was below her overall cognitive scores, but only by 1.3 standard deviations. Although Mae met criteria for the program for students with developmental disabilities, she did not qualify to receive speech and language services.

When it was time for Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings to be held, Nathan's was at the school of his expected attendance, and both parents were present. Nathan's parents insisted that he be placed in a regular classroom with additional services (speech, vision, hearing, physical and occupational therapies) provided in that classroom. Pull-out was to be minimal, i.e., for feeding, health and cleansing needs.

But during the IEP meeting, tensions ran high. Because of the complexity of the case, the IEP meeting was attended by specialists and supervisors from almost every area of special education and related services. Supervisors reacted with skepticism and had difficulty envisioning the regular classroom as an appropriate program for Nathan. They were legitimately concerned that Nathan would lose individualized attention, and the regular education students in Nathan's classroom would lose teacher time which would be required for Nathan's care. The first grade teacher and school principal were open and perhaps more naive of the challenge before them. Their primary questions and concerns regarded Nathan's physical safety, such as mobility problems in the event of a building emergency. Overall, they

appeared more willing to visualize educational alternatives for Nathan than their special education counterparts. Nathan's IEP was ultimately written for regular education inclusion.

Mae's IEP was held at the special education office during winter break. Vacations pose a unique problem for special education because the 90 day legal timeclock keeps ticking, but unfortunately, teachers and many administrators are on vacation. MSD's procedure during these times is to invite guardians to IEP meetings with a supervisor on duty at the special education office. Although on major bus lines, transportation can take well over one hour for many residents. In fact, parent attendance during these periods is so poor, conferences have been scheduled simultaneously knowing parents cannot surmount the hurdles the school district places before them.

When I returned from vacation, I learned Mae's mother did not appear for the IEP meeting. The date of the missed meeting was written on all written forms and coded into the computer tracking system. On paper, MSD was in compliance with P.L.94-142. Mae's mother would then receive another standardized form indicating the meeting was held, Mae's IEP, a placement offer and another consent form for her to sign. Mae's IEP was generated using a new computer software program which allowed specialists to independently choose objectives for Mae. These pages were then stapled together to form her IEP.

In follow-up visits to Nathan in his regular education classroom, I did not observe significant "measurable" gains, but

this probably would have been the case in a self-contained class as well, given the severity and complexity of his problems. His wheelchair was in the front of the room where the teacher was presenting lessons to 24 students including Nathan who would periodically disturb the instruction with loud uncontrollable outbursts. Reducing the number of these outbursts was a mutual goal of support staff, but it was quickly becoming a major problem for the classroom teacher, who was doing an outstanding job, but desperately needed support for classroom management. She received little more than verbal praise for her outstanding efforts and "stamina". Specialists provided therapy for Nathan in a corner of his classroom, just as they would have in a pull-out program. Planning and goal sharing was not occurring.

As special educators anticipated, Nathan was receiving considerably less individualized instruction than he had in the past. Because he was placed in a school with few special education classes, therapists did not routinely travel to the school. Therefore, contact time for supportive services was lower than it would have been in a placement more devoted to special education. However, what was noteworthy in Nathan's placement was the change in staff and regular education students. I saw first graders walking next to Nathan's wheelchair, touching and holding his hand and moving his wheelchair so he could "see and hear the teacher better". None of us involved with Nathan could actually determine if he was aware of all this "TLC", but

we were all impressed by the strong, genuine concern for his physical and educational welfare by his classmates.

Across town, forty-five minutes from her home was Mae. She was enrolled with eight other students in a self-contained class for students with developmental disabilities taught by a teacher holding a master's degree in special education and a para-professional with a bachelor's degree and special education coursework. I observed the teacher working one on one with Mae trying to increase her kinesthetic awareness through hot and cold stimulation. Nathan had to receive his tactile stimulation from peers touching and rubbing his arms; there simply was no time for one on one instruction in a class of twenty-four students. Mae's class took walks to improve their mobility in the community with emphasis on changing colors of stop and go lights and "walk" and "don't walk" signs. Nathan's class instruction was on subtraction, cursive writing and oral language.

Mae too had periods when she did not receive one on one instruction. She would sit off in a corner unnoticed while the teacher and para-professional worked with other students, but her peers did not run up to her to take care of her; they had enough problems of their own and did not worry about Mae.

As I left these students, I tried to decide which was the better program. I wanted to choose between self-contained special education classes or total inclusion for all special education students. I began to analyze all the mistakes we had made for all of our Nathan's and Mae's and questioned why. Why

did we wait for people, like Nathan's parents, to force us to think in different ways? I was still looking at the question from my functionalist, special education point of view as I returned to university studies. It was there the focus of my inquiry changed.

Deconstruction of Special Education Practices

Mae and Nathan's story is characteristic of special education's reaction to P.L.94-142. Prior to its passage, the policies and practices of special education were essentially uncontrolled. Court proceedings leading to passage tragically narrate tale after tale of worst case scenarios of children inappropriately placed in special education classes based on inadequate assessment with no team collaboration in decisions. Parents were inadequately informed, and students spent their entire educational careers in classrooms where they were isolated from all other aspects of the school receiving programming of questionable quality.

Passage of the P.L.94-142 was to guarantee students and their families that this deprivation of rights would not continue. P.L.94-142 created safeguards, insured informed communication and established procedures for appropriate programming. Placements in special education could no longer occur without a full team decision working from assessment measures that insured each child placed in special education was there on the basis of

a documented need. Guidelines were set in place to assure parent notification and informed consent in a timely fashion. Programming plans (IEP's) were defined to assure coordination and appropriate planning to meet each student's individualized need in the least restrictive environment. That was and remains the intent of the law. That is what was supposed to have happened.

Each protection assured by P.L.94-142 was met with a response from special education. Early implementation was altruistic, and I believe, student issues were paramount. But over the years, special interests other than those of children resulted in policies and practices that disempower students and their families. These responses center around three themes: (a) excessive quantification and monitoring for placements, (b) one-way communication, (c) categorical placements in place of collaborative programming. Table 1 summarizes and contrasts the protection provided by P.L.94-142 with special education's responses. Using these three themes as the scaffolding, I will deconstruct Mae and Nathan's story according to the multiple perspectives of functionalism, interpretivism and critical theory. The results of this analysis is summarized in Table 2.

Quantification for Placement

Timelines. In many ways functionalist thought has served special education well. Through this paradigm we have developed computer monitoring systems that ensure the timelines of P.L.94-142 are met, that all students receive their due process rights. But have we gone too far? There is an overemphasis on legal

compliance and timelines, such that the "means" to appropriate programming have now become the "ends". It is much easier to measure when a child's 90 day timeline for placement has expired than to determine why Johnny can't read. When Mae's referral was delayed for the sake of busy schedules, we were no longer using a paradigm; it controlled us.

Interpretivist thought implies that we continually evaluate and interpret the systems we use. Under this paradigm, we ask ourselves, "Is the monitoring system currently in place addressing individual student needs as best it can, or has it lost its purpose to efficiency, order and the status quo? Cumbersome methods no longer serve the needs of students, but often delay initiation of services. Ninety days was meant to be the maximum amount of time for programming to be offered, but it has become the norm for many busy administrators and teachers who withhold service until the 90th day. The interests of the students have been lost to those of the bureaucracy.

Critical theorists charge that we intentionally deprive students of their rights in a never ending struggle for power. We in education, who view ourselves as child advocates, scoff, but this accusation cannot be easily dismissed. How easy it is on busy days to simply lay aside a student's needs, as Mae's referral, for another day, and then another, just until our schedules improve. Are we not using power for our own ends?

Assessment and Criteria. Mae did not receive speech and language services due to tightened criteria; Nathan did. Clearly

MSD cannot provide special education services to all students, nor should they; that is not the issue. Criteria were developed as a response to the categorical language of P.L.94-142. Resources are allocated categorically, and enrollment limits are monitored by state and federal guidelines. Recently, P.L.94-142 was re-authorized and renamed to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), but the elaborate structure for categorizing based on disability was not significantly altered. Instead, additional categories were added.

In this period of educational history, when standardized testing is being challenged on all fronts, this change to more, rather than less quantifiable guidelines is particularly puzzling. While regular educators are enthusiastically embracing more interpretive alternatives, such as, portfolio assessment, their special education counterparts are increasing their dependence on standardized measures and developing guidelines that exclude students based on further quantification. This clearly demonstrates special education's entrapment in one paradigm. An interpretive outlook would seek assessment measures less dependent on standardized testing, but rather those rich in descriptions of human behavior describing the child as a whole rather than dichotomous parts. Arena assessment is one avenue for cooperative evaluation with each professional contributing to a total group decision rather than as categorized specialists.

MSD's previous criteria allowed professionals to describe disabilities rather than quantify them. Had MSD looked at the

problem through an interpretivist's lens they would have seen other alternatives. As a result of the re-written criteria there will have to be extensive staff development programs to explain the new guidelines to those who must use them. This use of staff development time could have been spent on sensitizing staff to their own cognitive use of paradigms and providing rationales for selection criteria and alternative assessment concepts rather than on "cookbook" guidelines. Techniques demonstrating alternative, collaborative assessment procedures would have been far more beneficial for staff and the school district over a longer period of time.

Critical theorists question why are not all students entitled to an appropriate education? Some of the most frustrating choices facing special and regular education today involve those for students who fall in that "grey area" between the two tracks. Critical theorists challenge the existence of those separate tracks calling for a merger of special and regular education and entitling all students access to resources to provide quality education for all.

One-Way Communication

Written Communications. Mae's mother was genuinely concerned about her daughter's success in school, but was unable to read or interpret the communications sent to her. One of the primary rights of guardians mandated by P.L.94-142 is reasonable notice at each stage in the diagnostic and placement process in a manner that is understandable, such as, in their primary

language. Standardized forms, special education's response to informed notification, consent and participation, is the expedient, efficient solution characteristic of functionalism. An ideal speech situation, as proposed by the critical theorist, Jurgen Habermas (1970) provides emancipatory power for parents, but only if we speak in language that is true, sincere, correct and above all comprehensible.

There is one standardized format MSD sends to all parents/guardians no matter what their comprehension level. Since one third of the adults in the United States are functionally illiterate, and most of those live in urban areas (Kozol, 1985), it is probable that many of the guardians who receive communications from MSD cannot read them. We know this, and yet we continue to send them. These notices and forms that arrive in the hands of guardians via certified mail are permeated with "legalese". Parents, by law, are to be interacting in the diagnostic and placement process. How can they interact with certified mail they are unable to read or clearly understand? This is hardly an "ideal speech situation". Sincere and understandable communications empower parents by enabling them to participate in open discourse, but critical theorists accuse educators of intentionally holding power over parents through incomprehensible communications.

Interpretivist thinking recognizes that school districts must document their efforts to insure due process. Some administrators try to add an interpretive, individualistic touch

to standardized communications by suggesting they be supplanted with personal contacts, but they also know that this involves unrealistic time expectations for staff. These same administrators are not working in behalf of staffs and students when they do not make concerted efforts to simplify procedures or advocate for such endeavors to school board members and the tax-paying public. Administrators and school districts using an interpretive perspective would encourage staff members to view each student and their families on an individual basis to determine appropriate modes of communication. Opportunities for alternatives to written communications, such as, school participation programs, home visits, and more active use of neighborhood centers would be an integral part of the parent involvement program.

Meetings with Parents. Mae's IEP meeting actually did not occur. The functionally oriented guidelines established to safeguard the 90 day timeline prevailed over interpretation of parent and student rights. Mae's IEP was scheduled at a time and location that placed unrealistic hurdles before her mother. School districts espousing a more interpretivist point of view enable staff members to hold parent meetings in locations that accommodate guardians, such as, in their homes, work place, neighborhood schools or community centers. Transportation is made readily available.

Centralized administrative offices are a product of functionalism. They were created to centralize the "business" of

schools making it efficient at low cost. The argument for some centralized functions is still made, i.e., purchasing, but neither functionalists nor interpretivists recognize any efficiency in holding meetings for parents in central locations in lieu of neighborhood schools. Central offices, according to a critical theory point of view, geographically isolate service providers and recipients and create imposing physical structures that communicate subtle, but very clear power messages.

Special education administrators and managers located within schools throughout the district is more consistent with collaboration, site based management and accessibility. In this age of computers, modems and FAX machines, proximity for communication with colleagues is no longer a valid rationale for maintaining current practices.

Categorical Placements

The special educators at Nathan's IEP meeting spoke of lost opportunities and less teacher contact time for Nathan in a regular education classroom. Follow-up visits proved they were right; Mae was receiving more individualized instruction. But Nathan had the advantages provided by his contact with peers. Why had the supervisors been so reluctant to try something new for Nathan? Were they aware of alternative paradigms but unable to shift, or simply unaware and locked in the functionalist paradigm established by the policies and procedures developed by the organization?

Special education emerged from a functionalistic, normalization model. Educators using this point of view write IEP's including techniques that are well researched according to separate areas of study. Goals are written to suit perceived norms, most frequently white, middle class standards. Designers of these IEP's ask the question, "What technique should I use with a student like this? The purpose is to transmit the dominant norm to special education students until they achieve normalization. Skrtic (1991) asserts that under this paradigm, special education pigeonholes staff and students into the organizational bureaucracy with the intent of screening heterogeneity.

An interpretivist outlook on the other hand would look for an inter-related program asking, "What should we as a team do for this student? It would call for an IEP with emphasis on collaboration and social processes rather than a disjointed, categorical approach. Mae's IEP consisted of computer generated pages of objectives with no staff collaboration which were then stapled together. As a result, it was fragmented with overlapping objectives that were, on occasion, at cross purposes with each other.

An IEP written from an interpretivist framework would be a total instructional plan written by a team of well trained regular and special education individuals in collaboration with guardians. It would utilize computer technology, but only in ways that generate a holistic, inter-related program of the best

goals rejecting methods that include only close approximations to meet a student's needs.

Critical theorists reject normalization and the purpose and intent of the IEP itself asserting that an appropriate education is the right of all students. They ask, "What should we do to help each student actualize his/her full potential?" Nathan's classroom teacher needed support which she did not receive. Once Nathan was assigned to her classroom, the problem was solved according to functionalism. The most critical component of successful inclusion of special education students into regular classrooms is collaboration between staff members, parents and students. The REI differs from mainstreaming in its emphasis on altering regular education settings to accommodate special education students. Collaboration between regular and special educators is one key element for the REI's success.

Nathan's parents were coming from a critical theory perspective by trying to emancipate him from the special education label and return him to his peers in the regular classroom. Theoretically, the special education supervisors at Nathan's IEP meeting were dissatisfied with the status quo. Why were they not the instigators of change; were they just too comfortable with their day to day routine? They resisted change much like many of us who complain about the inadequacies of a word processing program, but resist the computer specialist who comes in with a new system. Nathan's parents were that new computer program that would break familiar routines. The result

was a battle for control between caring, yet assertive parents using hearings and lawsuits as their tools of power, and dedicated, but unfortunately, comfortable professionals. If Nathan's parents were truly empowered as collaborators, this might not have been the case. Special education's emphasis on categorical, one-sided decisions disempowered them, and to regain control, they too used functionalist tools the expense of collaboration and dialogue by both sides.

An alternative scenario would depict these same decision-makers first trying to analyze their own thoughts and behaviors in an attempt to understand their own perspective on this complex and controversial issue emanated. They would ask themselves if they were looking beyond "what is" to dream "what could be," or were they so concerned with the mechanics and economics of day to day operations that they were no longer able to dream.

After questioning and challenging their own paradigms these educators and administrators could free themselves from the confines of their specialty departments. They would not be held captive by their need for prediction and order at the expense of discovery of new alternatives and would be able to interpret and understand thinking beyond special education in their search for the gestalt for Nathan. Nathan's IEP meeting then might have been a meeting of enthusiastic professionals each sharing creative alternatives. His program would be provided by collaborators unconcerned about territorial protection. The focus of his IEP would not be the quality of the written product,

but rather the collaborative efforts used to achieve it and how they would serve Nathan.

Concluding Remarks

As I step back and review the processes involved in writing this paper, I realize I have undergone a change. Initially, my functionalist background led my writing, and the entire endeavor was a struggle. When I began reading the paradigm literature working my way through new terminology, I was critical of its lack of empirical evidence and predictive value. But with each reading, I became more open to alternative ways of viewing. I am still wearing my functionalist glasses and do not plan to throw them out, for they have served me well and can continue to do so. But slowly the prescription is changing.

Throughout the writing I found myself pulled to decide which is the best perspective. I continually fought inclinations to draw conclusions, what I envisioned as useable products. With each revision, I concluded Nathan and Mae's story differently, because I was trying to answer the question in each reader's mind, "Which student will benefit most throughout their educational program?" Finally, the purpose of this writing became more clear. Although we in special education do not have answers, and maybe never will, our search for them will be more appropriate if we use multiple perspectives.

Many of us in special education are frustrated with current practices, but we are not thinking in terms of major reform; we see that as a regular education issue. The REI is simply another

passing trend which will leave its imprints on our thinking and practices, but we do not view it as reform. The merger discussion is just rhetoric for most of us. And so, although we are frustrated, we remain in our status quo, because that is the way we were trained.

Many blame education's woes on power struggles. This may sometimes be the case, but I believe, a great part of the dilemma stems from our deficit in metacognitive use of paradigms. We simply do not think about or understand the perspectives that frame our actions. Most administrators in special education are products of higher education training programs based in quantifiable research methods. As undergraduate students, we were classified in categorical programs of our choosing. These programs trained us to be critical "choosers" of techniques with demonstrated significance in quasi-experimental research. That emphasis continued throughout our graduate programs and educational administration coursework, so it is not surprising that we do not view ourselves as "questioners" in our professional environments. Our inability to use alternative frames locks special education into rigid policies and procedures which are in direct opposition to our intentions. We remain trained in functionalist thought until we educate ourselves in multiple paradigms, but for many of us, this just is not happening.

These same special education administrators are now expected to transform staffs into collaborative units of mutualism and

harmony capable of viewing through multiple perspectives. Many of these administrators have not made that transformation themselves. If my experience demonstrates anything, it is that this can be learned. But I was guided by my university program, selected readings and reflective journal writing. They too need this help.

Reform is decided by visionaries, whether they be legislators or parents, such as Nathan's. What these visionaries have in common is the ability to shift paradigms, to question their perspectives and envision alternatives. Reform of special education cannot occur until those with the actual power, the administrators and teachers in the schools, also have this ability. Collaboration will not work; it cannot until they recognize and control the frameworks behind their actions. Educational programs can help them remove the blinders from their eyes..

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Table 1: Comparison of P.L.94-142 Safeguards and Special Education's Response

LEGAL PROTECTION	SPECIAL EDUCATION'S RESPONSE
Placement Safeguards	Quantification
guided by timelines	emphasis on surveillance
adequate assessment	quantified assessment
evidence of need decided by a team	categorical, criteria bound decisions
Informed Interactions	One-way Communication
parent notification	documented delivery
informed consent	legalistic forms
collaborative decisions	"power" meetings
Collaborative Programming	Categorical Placements
team planning	disjointed, individually developed IEP's
least restrictive environment	self-contained and pull-out programs
collaborative instruction	isolated instruction

Table 2: Special Education Practices Viewed from Multiple Perspectives

PRACTICE	FUNCTIONALISM	INTERPRETIVISM	CRITICAL THEORY
Quantification for Placement	timelines viewed as maximums	timelines viewed individually	timelines viewed as minimums
	standardized tests	portfolios; cooperative assessment	merge special and regular education
	quantified program criteria	descriptive guidelines	quality instruction for all students
One-way Communication	standardized forms; certified mail	individualized communications	ideal speech situations
			empowered parents
	central office meetings; arbitrary locations and times	accessible locations and times; mutually arranged	open, two-way communication
Categorical Placements	transform students	transform students	transform classrooms
	dominant norms	individualized	declassifies
	categorical	holistic; interrelated	emancipation
	computer IEP's	collaborative IEP's	describes behavior
	What do we do with students like this?	What do we do for this student?	How can each student actualize their full potential?